

Institution: Newcastle University

Unit of Assessment: Sociology UoA 23

a. Context:

Sociology at Newcastle has a strong tradition of developing research in collaboration with a wide range of users and beneficiaries, recognising, conceptually and politically, the importance of co-inquiry in the co-production of knowledge. A distinctive feature of our work is the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre (PEALS) which has been at the vanguard of the integration of the academy and civil society through its longstanding aims to research, inform and improve professional practices, policymaking and public participation in developments in the life sciences. This approach is reflected in the growing track record of impact activities across the unit, supported by both external funding and University resources and strategies. Our non-academic user groups and beneficiaries include: local, national and supra-national governments; public sector professionals; non-governmental organisations, and participants in arts and cultural practices. Since our research includes international collaborators, the reach and significance of its impact extends to international policy, practice and public domains.

During 2008-2013, our research has had particularly significant impact in the following areas:

(1) Influencing policy debates and professional practices: Much of our research is closely orientated to the needs and demands of public sector professions and has influenced policy debates. For example, knowledge exchange between clinicians and patients, via regional workshops, is integral to Graham's NIHR-funded research, improving the management and experience of prenatal diagnosis and reproductive loss. Haimes uses her research to inform her contributions to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Ethics Advisory Board. Woods has run over 50 training events for researchers and ethics committee members; he is also a Department of Health-appointed member of the NHS National Research Ethics Advisors' Panel. Colleagues have worked closely with the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority: Haimes as social science adviser to the Ethics and Law Advisory Committee, 2009-10, and Scully as member of their Oversight Group to the public consultation on mitochondrial research. McLaughlin presented evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Muscular Dystrophy and her film on sport and disability, made with local disabled young people, was distributed to 400 health professionals. Campbell's Knowledge Transfer Partnership (2006-9) has ongoing influence on policy development and operational practice in the criminal justice system via Northumbria Criminal Justice Board, the House of Commons Justice Committee and the Office for Criminal Justice Reform. Two of our former PGR students have gone on to apply their research training in professional policy work – McNulty with the Newcastle Health and Race Equality Forum, and Poudel with the International Organization for Migration and USAID. Our influence on policy debates and professional practice is reflected strongly in our three impact case studies.

(2) Co-producing cultural capital: We have a distinctive record of integrating research with the arts and mass media, co-producing, with a diverse range of partners, cultural resources from which local, national and international communities have benefitted. Research by Hollands and Vail on the transformative potential of alternative arts practices has contributed to the evolution of local arts groups, and, internationally, has assisted wider urban renewal agendas through Hollands' role as consultant to Geneva and Prague city councils. McLaughlin works with disabled young people to produce visual materials to explore identities and produce narratives to challenge prejudice. PEALS' sustained involvement with the Cafe Scientifique programme enables direct participation by Newcastle citizens in debates around developments in the life sciences. Further examples of our influence in partnership with the arts include: Lawler's invited participation in the Serpentine Gallery's Map Marathon; Scully as ethics consultant on the documentary 'Centrefold'; Woods' participation in 'Death Animations' at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art; Hollands' links with Northern Film and Media, Film 4 and the film and arts trade union BECTU. Colleagues have also contributed extensively to enhancing dialogue on key social issues in the mass media, including BBC Radio 4 (Degnen, Lawler, Scully, Moreno-Figueroa, Richardson) and various national and international print outlets (Casey, Scully, Moreno-Figueroa, Payne, Richardson).

Developing, sharing and broadening our experience of co-producing cultural capital is one of the

Impact template (REF3a)

key aims of our future impact strategy.

(3) Building capacity through knowledge exchange: Our research has assisted a range of users to generate their own impacts. McLaughlin's work is an exemplar of this approach, actively involving interest groups in research design, implementation and engagement, including: Contact a Family, Unique, the Genetic Alliance and the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign Group. She has also worked with Newcastle City Council Children and Young Persons' Participation Unit. These involvements help build the confidence of 'lay' groups in their dialogues with practitioners. Phillimore's FP7-funded projects were designed specifically to enhance the capacity of local public health systems, initially in Tunisia, Palestine, Turkey and Syria, and now also Jordan and Lebanon, to manage chronic disease; this is in partnership with the World Health Organisation. Extracts from Gallinat's research on East German memory and identity were distributed in a newsletter of the German Office for Political Education to all secondary schools and higher and further education institutions to serve as teaching materials. A PEALS workshop with the British Federation of Women Graduates led to that group submitting a response to the HFEA's consultation on mitochondrial research. Collaborations funded by the Northern Rock Foundation between PEALS, the United Black Youth Association and Swingbridge filmmakers resulted in DVDs showing the work of young women from the UBYA on stem cell science and assisted the development of a community exchange project in Liverpool where local residents set up a women's support group and a community allotment. Similarly, Moreno-Figueroa's work with the Collective for the Elimination of Racism in Mexico (COPERA) co-develops tools to incorporate a 'race' perspective into NGOs, public policy and the work of human rights activists.

These knowledge exchange partnerships demonstrate that effective 'engagement' requires co-inquiry, co-practice and co-production.

b. Approach to impact:

We conceptualise impact as a variety of activities creating linear and non-linear pathways, achieving both predicted and unpredicted results. Central to our approach is ensuring that the voices of often-silenced communities are heard; this involves working in partnership with those communities and with those who need to hear them. Our understanding of how to achieve effective impact is influenced by the 'PEALS model' of the close integration of research, teaching and engagement. That model is clearly evidenced in the PEALS Annual International Symposia which bring together invited researchers, practitioners, policy advisers and interest groups to discuss the potential for research to improve everyday lives. Innovations in the use of film, photography and other cultural resources have been recognised for their originality and potential by ESRC and indicate that our approach to impact within the unit as a whole is dynamic, imaginative and successful. Resources available in the unit to support impact activities include: eligibility for using the Staff Travel Fund (£1300 per person per year) and the School's Engaged Research Fund (up to £500 per person per year) for exploratory impact work, flexibility in the use of School Small Research Grants to assist research-related impact (up to £1k per person per year), and up to £500 for each research cluster per year. Institutional support includes opportunities facilitated by the Faculty's Institute for Social Renewal and by the University's Engagement Strategy. Moreno-Figueroa's 'Interventions' project, which explored the potential for design to help articulate research findings, benefitted directly from funds, over several years, from the 'Faculty Futures' programme (an innovative opportunity for academic staff to develop their career paths and to discover and explore ways of contributing to shaping the future of the Faculty and of the University), the Small Research Grants budget and the University's Engagement Strategy. PEALS was funded by the University's Beacon for Public Engagement to run an event on 'Good practice in public engagement: expertise by experience' and McLaughlin's film on disability and sport was funded by the University's Institute for Social Renewal. These resources are underpinned by on-going activities that assist the generation of impact, including: collating and sharing information about successful mechanisms; discussions in individuals' annual Performance and Development Reviews of current activities and future plans; assistance and training in a variety of media to target research dissemination; and advice, training and mentoring for PGRs and ECRs in impact-related activities.

c. Strategy and plans:

Our approach to impact is evolving and evidence-based. We are developing mechanisms, infrastructure and capacities across 6 areas to maximise impact:

(i) Building our capacity: Our strategy recognises the centrality of researcher capacity and capability in generating impacts. We are building a critical mass of individuals with experience to share, particularly in arts and cultural activities, and will be developing training resources in that area. This strategy requires associated developments such as: the weighting of impact activities within workload models, recognition in promotions criteria, and the strategic use of university and unit resources (including time, funding, and the use of the university estate).

(ii) Building partnerships: Our emergent communications strategy makes active use of traditional and newer social media. We will continue to work closely with the University and external public relations teams to demonstrate the relevance of our research to wider communities and users, in order to forge and expand new links with potential Impact Partners.

(iii) Formalising links with potential research users: We shall seek, where appropriate, to formalise links with non-academic colleagues through their membership of a School Advisory Board drawing on public, private and voluntary sector expertise, to inform future strategies.

(iv) Recognising partnerships: Inspired by Richardson's links with the organisation Shakti Samuha, we are developing an Impact Partners scheme both to give public recognition to partners and to assist them in leveraging additional resources for their core activities.

(v) 'Excellence with a purpose': Our unit strategies will be aligned with Newcastle University's institutional strategy to be a world leading civic university with a commitment to using knowledge production to the benefit of local, national and international communities.

(vi) Impacting the 'impact agenda': We shall contribute to shaping and maintaining the relevance of the 'impact agenda' through contributions to professional associations and networks, including the British Sociological Association, the International Sociological Association and the Campaign for the Public University.

d. Relationship to case studies:

Our impact case studies exemplify our approach and demonstrate the significance and reach of that impact. Their success in so doing helps in turn to shape our current and future strategies for achieving research impact outside the academy.

Bringing tissue providers' voices into the ethical governance of clinical research. This case study demonstrates how our work influences policy development and implementation. Haimes' research on the socio-ethical challenges of the use of human tissue in biomedical research helped shape the design and implementation of ethical protection measures for the 500,000 tissue donors to UK Biobank; influenced the Nuffield Council on Bioethics' policy advice on the ethics of encouraging donations of human tissue to research; and led to the production of a major Position Statement of the International Society for Stem Cell Research.

Sexuality, gender and citizenship struggles: influencing policies and building capacity to challenge exclusion. This case study illustrates how conceptually-focused research has informed practical strategies for the achievement of citizenship rights in two different contexts. Richardson's research on equalities initiatives in UK local government and on post-trafficking livelihoods in Nepal has, through close collaboration with research users, contributed significantly to the capacities of specific groups to claim rights and to develop strategies for effecting change, resulting in material benefits and improvements in quality of life.

The struggle for material democratisation: contributing to the defence of essential water and sanitation services in Latin America. This case study shows how our research shapes policy, contributes to capacity building and reaches diverse users. Castro's research on the privatisation and then re-municipalisation of water and sanitation infrastructures has informed the strategies of national, regional and local government officials, trades unions and citizen movements in Latin America and Europe. Legislative changes and new training of public servants, union members and social movements, have resulted directly from Castro's research, which aimed, from its outset, to contribute to social change, democratisation and citizenship.